

# Neurodiversity in Training Design Handout

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## Do you recognise yourself in any of these?

ASC Positive Traits	ASC Challenging presentations
Attention to detail • Thoroughness • Accuracy	Perfectionism, takes too long to complete tasks
Deep focus • Concentration • Freedom from distraction	Self isolates, pulls away from team, seems to not listen, listens to music
Observational skills • Listen, look, learn approach • Fact finding	Notices everything, refining focus difficult, gets distracted, asks lots of questions that might not seem to others to be related
Absorb and retain facts • Excellent long-term memory • Superior recall	Knows it all, compelled to tell people the right answer (not ego driven), possible lack of timing, not aware or careful of other people's fragile egos
Visual skills • Visual learning and recall • Detail-focused	Can struggle with audio/verbal only instructions. Might need to see it written down so they can refer to it - not necessarily as a picture.
Expertise • In-depth knowledge • High level of skills	Specialist, often doesn't want to broaden knowledge and skills into other subjects
Methodical approach • Analytical • Spotting patterns, repetition	Can be seen to "check out" whilst analysing, might take longer to analyse a report but findings are superior
Novel approaches • Unique thought processes • Innovative solutions	Disruptive, eccentric, unusual communication or behaviours, excitable, enthusiastic, out of step with the team vibe, can't wait to blurt it out/take over
Creativity • Distinctive imagination • Expression of ideas	Wild or outrageous ideas, might find it difficult and frustrating to explain to others, can be very innovative but ahead of their time
Tenacity and resilience • Determination • Challenge opinions	Could be seen as aggressive, confrontational, abrasive or combative when expressing passion or challenging something
Integrity • Honesty, loyalty • Commitment	Cannot understand why others don't share values, expects others to do so
Accepting of difference • Less likely to judge others • May question norms	Gullibility. Trusting. Takes everyone on face value and to say what they mean and mean what they say. Logical thought doesn't take into consideration societal rules, game playing, politics etc.

## Emotional Intelligence

### 1. You think about feelings

Emotional intelligence begins with what is called self- and social awareness, the ability to recognise emotions (and their impact) in both yourself and others. That awareness begins with reflection. You ask questions like:

- \* What are my emotional strengths? What are my weaknesses?
- \* How does my current mood affect my thoughts and decision making?
- \* What's going on under the surface that influences what others say or do?

Pondering questions like these yield valuable insights that can be used to your advantage.

### 2. You pause.

The pause is as simple as taking a moment to stop and think before you speak or act. (Easy in theory, difficult in practice.) This can help save you from embarrassing moments or from making commitments too quickly.

In other words, pausing helps you refrain from making a permanent decision based on a temporary emotion.

### 3. You strive to control your thoughts.

You don't have much control over the emotion you experience in a given moment. But you can control your reaction to those emotions--by focusing on your thoughts. (As it's been said: You can't prevent a bird from landing on your head, but you can keep it from building a nest.)

By striving to control your thoughts, you resist becoming a slave to your emotions, allowing yourself to live in a way that's in harmony with your goals and values.

### 4. You benefit from criticism.

Nobody enjoys negative feedback. But you know that criticism is a chance to learn, even if it's not delivered in the best way. And even when it's unfounded, it gives you a window into how others think.

When you receive negative feedback, you keep your emotions in check and ask yourself: How can this make me better?

**5. You show authenticity.**

Authenticity doesn't mean sharing everything about yourself, to everyone, all of the time. It does mean saying what you mean, meaning what you say, and sticking to your values and principles above all else.

You know not everyone will appreciate your sharing your thoughts and feelings. But the ones who matter will.

**6. You demonstrate empathy.**

The ability to show empathy, which includes understanding others' thoughts and feelings, helps you connect with others. Instead of judging or labelling others, you work hard to see things through their eyes.

Empathy doesn't necessarily mean agreeing with another person's point of view. Rather, it's about striving to understand--which allows you to build deeper, more connected relationships.

**7. You praise others.**

All humans crave acknowledgement and appreciation. When you commend others, you satisfy that craving and build trust in the process.

This all begins when you focus on the good in others. Then, by sharing specifically what you appreciate, you inspire them to be the best version of themselves.

**8. You give helpful feedback.**

Negative feedback has great potential to hurt the feelings of others. Realising this, you reframe criticism as constructive feedback, so the recipient sees it as helpful instead of harmful.

**9. You apologise.**

It takes strength and courage to be able to say you're sorry. But doing so demonstrates humility, a quality that will naturally draw others to you.

Emotional intelligence helps you realise that apologising doesn't always mean you're wrong. It does mean valuing your relationship more than your ego.

**10. You forgive and forget.**

Hanging on to resentment is like leaving a knife inside a wound. While the offending party moves on with their life, you never give yourself the chance to heal.

When you forgive and forget, you prevent others from holding your emotions hostage--allowing you to move forward.

**11. You keep your commitments.**

It's common nowadays for people to break an agreement or commitment when they feel like it. Of course, bailing on an evening of Netflix with a friend will cause less harm than breaking a promise to your child or missing a major business deadline.

But when you make a habit of keeping your word--in things big and small--you develop a strong reputation for reliability and trustworthiness.

**12. You help others.**

One of the greatest ways to positively impact the emotions of others is to help them.

Most people don't really care where you graduated from, or even about your previous accomplishments. But what about the hours you're willing to take out of your schedule to listen or help out? Your readiness to get down in the trenches and work alongside them?

Actions like these build trust and inspire others to follow your lead when it counts.

**13. You protect yourself from emotional sabotage.**

You realise that emotional intelligence also has a dark side--such as when individuals attempt to manipulate others' emotions to promote a personal agenda or for some other selfish cause.

And that's why you continue to sharpen your own emotional intelligence--to protect yourself when they do.

## Empathy vs Sympathy

### Three Types of Empathy

**1. Cognitive – The desire to understand.** Simply knowing how the other person feels and what they might be thinking. Sometimes called perspective-taking, this kind of empathy can help in, say, a negotiation or in motivating people. But cognitive empathy can illustrate the “too cold to care” phenomenon: When people try to understand another person’s point of view without internalizing his or her emotions, they can be so detached that they’re not motivated to do anything to actually help that person.

**2. Compassionate – The desire to help and support.** We not only understand a person’s predicament and feel with them, but are spontaneously moved to help, if needed. This can lead to outbursts of what he calls “constructive anger.” In other words, reacting negatively to injustice or suffering can motivate us to work with others to make the world a better place. Just as empathy has its downsides, negative emotions like anger can have upsides. Staying cool in a crisis might bring some benefits. But sometimes we must let ourselves get hot in order to help.

**3. Emotional – The desire to feel.** When you physically feel what other people feel, as though their emotions were contagious. This emotional contagion depends in large part on cells in the brain called mirror neurons, which fire when we sense another’s emotional state, creating an echo of that state inside our own minds. Emotional empathy attunes us to another person’s inner emotional world, a plus for a wide range of professions, from sales to nursing—not to mention for any parent or lover.

But wait: Emotional empathy has a downside, too, especially for first responders. In a state of emotional empathy, people sometimes lack the ability to manage their own distressing emotions, which can lead to paralysis and psychological exhaustion. Medical professionals often inoculate themselves against this kind of burnout by developing a sense of detachment from their patients.

### What is Sympathy?

Feelings of pity and sorrow for someone else’s misfortune and understanding between people, common feeling. This is often what people say they are lacking from someone when they are actually hoping for an emotional empathetic response, and possibly a compassionate response if they are seeking help. Some people might respond with cognitive empathy – but you can’t *make* someone care about something if they don’t.

## The Meta Mirror method

If you are struggling to empathise with someone else you can take some time to reflect by using the Meta Mirror perceptual positions method.

Using three positions we can discover how the other party feels and gain overview of how the conversation or behaviour is impacting the people involved.



**Meta Mirror method:**

If you can replay the conversation, situation or discussion in your mind you can step into the shoes of each party and understand why they may be responding in that way. This is especially useful when resolving conflict, broken communication and difficult behaviour.

The process goes like this:

**Position 1** – recall what that individual was saying (was this you?) Notice your body language, facial expressions, are you fidgeting, what is the tone of your voice like?, eye contact? What are you doing with your hands? What questions are you asking? Are you listening or telling?

**Position 2** - hear what that individual was saying, notice their body language, facial expressions, are they fidgeting, what is the tone of their voice like?, eye contact? What are they doing with their hands? Are they asking any questions? Or just answering yours?

**Position 3** – Observe the conversation as it plays out and notice how each person uses language, gestures etc. What is working, what is not working, what have the individuals not noticed about each other? What questions were not asked? What is not being said? If this conversation was run again – could it be improved upon? What would you do differently?

This is really helpful in changing your approach to communication and behaviours, whether you are a manager, director or a supervisor or an employee without any people-management responsibilities. (It's also useful for any disputes or arguments at any time home or work.)



## Training Design

- **Reasonable adjustments: Designing for a neurodiverse attendee**

- a) Gap Analysis & Objectives**

Is everyone starting from the same place?

What does the client want to achieve?

Do they know who is in the audience?

Participants, Passengers, Prisoners, Protestors

A lot of the traditional information about training is based on neurotypical trainers and attendees.

Crystal clear language – “I’m taking you from A to B in this training”

- b) Differences in processing to consider**

Processing differences – speed, complexity, abstract vs application (or concrete)

Visual/Auditory/Kinaesthetic/Blended

In person vs online

Introvert/extrovert/ambivert

Attention span/perceived attention

Stimming

Traits you might notice

Emotional Intelligence – Become self-aware and you’ll also notice these things

In others, if someone lacks these you have a good idea they might need some extra help.

The three types of empathy and the difference to sympathy

The Meta Mirror – useful exercise to teach people who are not self-aware on how to see things from others’ perspectives. Very useful if you are tasked with gaining group buy-in.

- c) Adult Learning theory - responses**

- Lecture
- Exercises in groups or individual
- Role Play
- Case Studies
- Demonstration

## 2. Accommodations - Prior to delivery

### a) Pre-work

Know that not everyone will complete pre-work no matter how you try to mandate it. Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) especially gets in the way. Sometimes last-minute do it but sometimes not at all, plus absent mindedness, out of sight out of mind, they may need many reminders. Consider a stepped response – asking them to complete something by a deadline and asking them to submit something to you to prove it's done - results of a pop quiz perhaps? Or a video/audio? Do you offer 1:1 coaching for people who are struggling? Perhaps a drop-in session instead?

Don't give more than three things to be completed in pre-work. It should be used to get them curious and excited about the up-coming training but is also a tool to try to get everyone on the same page.

You could give pre-work as a document, an online course, a quiz, a questionnaire, ask them to watch a video (with subtitles), listen to an audio, send them something in the post to look at. Try offering three options and ask them to pick just one. They would all lead to the same outcome.

#### Accessibility Checker for handouts and written pre-work:

If you use Microsoft Office and want to make sure the stuff you produce is easy to read for everyone follow this brilliant tip which I got from the fabulous IT support team at Genius Within CIC.

1. Open a document (Word , Excel, PowerPoint etc)
2. Click the Review tab along the top.
3. Click "Check Accessibility " on the next line
4. Tick the box at the bottom to keep the Accessibility Checker running while you work ( it might already be ticked)
5. If there are any Inspection Results click on the drop-down arrow to check for recommended actions.
6. Complete your task knowing you've taken steps to make sure its accessible and easy to read for everyone.
6. Pass this on to contacts and colleagues so they can do the same
7. Have a cuppa and pat yourself on the back for doing one small thing for inclusivity and accessibility.

**b) Joining Instructions**

Many mental health issues accompany neurodivergent minds and anxiety is at the top of the list.

Having certainty about expectations and instructions is crucial.

Send a calendar invitation out to each attendee or ask the client to if you have not got access to their emails.

If in person include: explicit parking instructions (parking lot, on the street or nearby, map?, do I have to pay? Can I pay with cash or do I have to phone someone? Is there bus/train access nearby? Is there someone where to lock up my bicycle?), how easy is it to find the building/room? Is there a security level to pass through? Is the room known to be a bit hot/cold? Is there pre-work I need to bring with me or send in advance? Do I need to bring any equipment (Notebook, pen, laptop) Do I need to bring their own refreshments? Will Lunch be served, if yes, what will it be? Fully labelled food is required to alleviate food anxiety.

If online: Zoom registration/teams registration etc or login details if registration not required. Bear in mind you may need to send out more than one email to ask people to register and remind them of the log in details - I would recommend you send them out the day before or the morning before on top of sending it a week in advance. If you ask people to register you can keep track of who is reading their emails and taking action. If you are not allowed to contact the participants yourself because it is corporate – coach the client to do it to get maximum attendance/chase stragglers.

Be clear about start time – e.g. Zoom opens at 8.45 for a 9am sharp start – please log into zoom at 0845 so we don't have any late comers. You will still get people logging in after 9am. If you tell people it's an 0845 start, open the zoom at 0830 for the early birds and create wither networking breakout rooms or a quiz or fun activity they can do to make them feel like it was worth turning up on time or early. (reward) The when the late ones turn up about 9am they have missed out of fun but not the core training and you shouldn't have to recap.

### **c) Research with client**

This bit is so important – but you have to be ready for clients to be completely unaware of the neurodiversity in their workforce.

One size fits all is still rife in most businesses and that means that there will always be people left behind. If you want to get the whole class to the same point you'll need to give some extra help to those that need it.

Your client hopefully knows who their target audience will be (less easy with a lunch and learn) and may have an idea of who will be in the room – getting insight into age, length of service and any quirks of personality will be very helpful – have that conversation about Participant, Passenger, Protestor and Prisoner to get a heads up. If your point of contact doesn't know because they are in L&D or HR ask to speak to the team leader if you are training a team. This insight will mean you can offer a top-notch service to your clients and they will see a full return on investment.

Let the client know you will be following up with them afterwards, so you can share how the training went, go over the feedback and identify any extra needs like 1:1 coaching or a supplementary session to embed knowledge. Or maybe you offer a video to share with them a week after the training to help maintain the key points.

The Ebbinghaus effect isn't well known but it's real and if the client is spending a lot of money with you to affect change, you can really shine here for very little effort. I record my videos directly after the training has finished so that it's fresh in my mind and I can make it personal if necessary. It only needs to be 5-10 mins long recapping the main points you want them to remember.

### 3. Adaptations - Tips for confident delivery

#### a) Facilitation techniques

Questions

Feedback to participants

Visual aids

- PowerPoint
- Video
- Flipchart/Whiteboard
- Annotate slides
- Props
- Colours
- Font

#### b) Handling a difficult audience

- Talkative people. These people are long-winded and monopolize the entire conversation. Since it's important for other participants to have the opportunity to contribute, it's your responsibility to deal firmly with talkers. To divert their energy, suggest that the talkative people participate in active listening, since they are usually poor listeners anyway. To prevent talkative people from stealing valuable lesson time, summarize the major points made and turn the discussion back to the group. If the talkers insist on participating, ask them closed questions to which they can reply only "yes" or "no."
- Silent types. On the other hand, some participants never say anything. Shy or reserved people rarely offer any comments in response to open questions because they may feel that their comments or ideas will be ridiculed by the group.  
The solution is to include silent people in the discussion. Encourage them to participate, and support their ideas. Ask them open-ended questions, because it gives them an opportunity to express an idea without wondering if their answer is precisely right. If you are having a problem eliciting a response, follow with an expectant, friendly look, then listen actively and respond only when necessary.

- **Crabs.** These people find fault with everything. If it's not the material, it's the physical environment that disturbs them. If you have such pessimists in the crowd you may hear complaints like, "Do we have to participate in this exercise?" or "This room is too cold." These people can put a damper on the rest of the group if not properly dealt with. Ignoring complainers only gives them license to continue. To declaw crabs, acknowledge their complaints and determine if their complaints are legitimate. If the complaints are problems that can be easily corrected, have the crabs suggest solutions and get feedback from the group. If the complaints aren't justified, suggest that you hope they will reserve judgment until the program is complete.
- **Know-It-Alls.** These people are experts concerning the subject at hand. They can be very condescending as they add to or correct what you've said. This disturbs the group because often these individuals offer unsolicited opinions and contradictions which undermine your authority.  
In dealing with know-it-alls, avoid getting into arguments and try to promote win-win situations without discrediting you or the know-it-alls. One way to do this is to acknowledge the know-it-alls' main points and thank them for their contributions. If they continue to press the point, tell them you are curious about their reason for attending your workshop in the first place. If the know-it-alls obviously don't know what they're talking about, suggest that they may be mistaken, yet allow them to save face.

### c) **Obtaining in-session feedback**

If you don't then anyone with PDA or other resistance to extra work (they may already feel overloaded, overwhelmed and overworked) will probably not do it even if it's a nicely laid out google form or other tool. A great way to capture feedback is in a post-it note session either in person or online. You can use a poll and the chat, or you could annotate a slide/whiteboard it. Capturing it in the session by revisiting the expectations captured at the start will close the loop.

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